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SUBJECT: DPM ISSAWI: ATTACKS ON INTERIOR MINISTER UNFAIR;
DAYLIGHT ON NINEWA DISPUTE; MALIKI TO RUN ALONE

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Gary A. Grappo for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Deputy Prime Minister Issawi told Pol M-C that criticism of Interior Minister Bolani in the wake of the August 19 Baghdad bombings was unfounded and designed to pressure Bolani to stay in the Shi'a fold for the upcoming parliamentary elections. Issawi was optimistic about reducing Arab-Kurd tensions in Ninewa province, believing that Ninewa Governor Nujaifi was genuinely interested in making progress on security issues. He predicted that Maliki would not join the Iraqi National Alliance as he demanded too dominant a role, but believed the PM would fail to forge a strong coalition with major secular or Sunni partners. Issawi said he was close to forming a Sunni electoral alliance which would hopefully attract former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi into a larger cross-sectarian electoral ticket. He expected the new national election law to provide for a "closed" election list. End summary.

Defending the Interior Minister

12. (C) In a September 6 meeting with Pol M-C, Deputy Prime Minister Rafi al-Issawi denounced criticism of Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani for his alleged responsibility for security lapses contributing to the August 19 bombings of Iraq's Foreign and Finance Ministries. Issawi said that although the Baghdad Operations Center (BOC), which was responsible for security in Baghdad and included General Jabr Abdul Nabi Muta'ib among its leaders, oversaw Ministry of Interior (MOI) personnel, the BOC nevertheless by-passed the MOI chain of command and reported directly to the Prime Minister's office. (Note: The PM established the BOC in early 2007 to provide unity of command for all security operations in Baghdad, giving the BOC operational control of both Ministry of Defense (MOD) and MOI forces in the capital. The BOC is dominated by the Iraqi Army and is commanded by Iraqi Army General Abud Qanbar al-Maliki, who has a close relationship with the PM. End Note.) Issawi said that criticism of Bolani, a Shi'a independent, was politically motivated and designed to deflect criticism away from the BOC, as well as to pressure the Interior Minister to discontinue talks with various Sunni leaders about forming a cross-sectarian electoral coalition.

Optimistic on Ninewa

13. (C) Issawi, while cognizant of highly strained Arab-Kurd relations in Ninewa, sounded a note of optimism about progress toward a resolution of outstanding issues, including the standoff in the Ninewa Provincial Council. He referred to a "new moment" among the parties in Ninewa, which presented an opportunity for progress. He stressed that a joint GOI-Kurdish security force was essential to effectively addressing security concerns in Ninewa. Issawi also underscored the importance of the GOI "recirculating" \$500 million from the 2006, 2007 and 2008 national budgets that was returned to GOI coffers when security conditions had

prevented the expenditure of the funds on numerous Ninewa-based projects. He characterized Ninewa Governor Atheel al-Nujaifi as sincere in wanting to resolve differences and "more practical" than his brother, MP Osama al-Nujaifi (a hardliner on Kurdish issues), since he daily faced the province's problems. Issawi noted that progress on security issues could open the way on the political front as well, adding that he had invited Governor Nujaifi for talks in Baghdad at the end of the current week.

Coalition Politics
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¶4. (C) Turning to the 2010 parliamentary elections, Issawi opined that Maliki would not join with the Shi'a-led Iraqi National Alliance (INA) because of differences over power sharing, rather than differences in political agendas. He said Maliki's "price" to align with the INA was the allocation of the largest bloc of parliamentary seats in the alliance to his party, as well as a guarantee that he would be the INA's PM nominee. The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and the Badr Organization, according to Issawi, would not accede to these demands.

¶5. (C) Issawi stated that Maliki might be able to gain the backing of some minor Sunni leaders in forming his own cross-sectarian coalition, but asserted that the PM would have difficulty gaining significant support from major Sunni groups. Part of Maliki's problem, he continued, is that his Da'wa party "tried to dominate the government like the Ba'ath Party." Since Sunnis saw that Maliki did not share power fairly with his coalition partners, they accordingly believed

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that he could not be trusted. Without significant Sunni partners, Issawi declared, Maliki would not be able to form a strong pre-electoral alliance.

¶6. (C) Issawi shared that he was "close to agreement" with Saleh al-Mutlaq (Iraqi Front for National Dialogue) and Osama al-Nujaifi (Iraqi National List (INL)) about forming an electoral coalition. He said the new grouping was also in coalition discussions with Iyad Allawi (INL), Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi (former Iraqi Islamic Party), and Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani (Shi'a head of Constitution Party). He highlighted Nujaifi's reservations about joining with Hashimi, commenting that Nujaifi would only link up with Hashimi if Allawi also joined the group. Issawi contended that if Allawi, who enjoyed a much more positive reputation for power sharing than Maliki or the INA's Ibrahim al-Jaafari, became part of the notional coalition, it would win a considerable number of parliamentary seats.

¶7. (C) On the pending elections law, Issawi stated that the parliament would likely approve legislation that features a "closed list" (i.e., a system where voters select parties/coalitions, rather than individual candidates) and one nation-wide voting district. He admitted that a closed list, while benefiting established parties and coalitions, was the "worst" option, but said that parliament's procrastination would prevent the discussion and compromise required to achieve a different outcome. Issawi called for U.S. assistance in arranging for monitoring by international election observers to help ensure the integrity of the Iraqi electoral process.

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